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ABSTRACT

This document uses interviews with 18 practitioners as the basis for an examination of the barriers to and promise of strategies intended to build effective, comprehensive, community-based service initiatives for children and families in a deregulated policy environment. Four major barriers are identified: (1) structural/legal barriers, reflected in legal constraints, regulations, and procedural requirements; (2) barriers to collaboration related to staff knowledge and commitment, which may result from a lack of technical expertise or rigid attitudes among administrators and service providers that limit the ability of initiatives to work collaboratively; (3) political support barriers, which relate to challenges of establishing and maintaining external support for an initiative among political and policy officials, key constituency groups, and the general public; (4) management information and evaluation data system barriers, which concern difficulties in constructing cross-agency data networks and outcomes-based assessment systems necessary for effective planning, budgeting, management, and evaluation. Policy directions at the state level holding promise for overcoming these constraints are also delineated: (1) coordinate state agency program strategies and resource allocation policies; (2) move toward an accountability system based on achieving desired results for children and families through reducing procedural regulation of service delivery; (3) invest in cross-agency information infrastructures; (4) encourage more integrated pre-service training experiences for service administrators and front-line providers; (5) provide monetary incentives for collaboration; (6) help ensure multi-year funding for comprehensive initiatives. A description of The Finance Project and a list of resources available from the Project's Working Papers Series conclude the document. Contains 22 references. (KDFB)

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BEYOND DECATEGORIZATION

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Defining Barriers and Potential Solutions to Creating Effective Comprehensive, Community-based Support Systems for Children and Families

April 1996

By Martin E. Orland
and Ellen Foley

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PREFACE

Public financing for education and an array of other children's services has become a topic of significant interest and political concern. Growing skepticism among a critical mass of American voters and taxpayers has fueled doubts about the ability of government to solve social problems and provide basic supports and services that enhance the quality of life in their communities. Voters spoke clearly in November 1994. They want more for their money. They want more and better services, but they also want balanced budgets and cuts in income and property taxes. In this time of big public deficits, they want government at all levels to operate more effectively and efficiently. They also want it to invest wisely and live within its means. On Capitol Hill on Washington, DC and in statehouses nationwide, policymakers are scrambling to respond.

Across the country, there is mounting evidence of efforts to reform and restructure education and other community supports and services in order to improve the lives and future prospects of children and their families. Critical to the success of these initiatives is the way in which they are financed. How revenues are generated and how funds are channeled to schools, human service agencies, and community development initiatives influence what programs and services are available. It determines how they are provided and who benefits from them. Financing also affects how state and local officials define investment and program priorities, and it creates incentives that guide how educators, other service providers, and community volunteers do their jobs. For these reasons, financing fundamentally affects how responsive programs and institutions are to the needs of the people and communities they are in business to serve.

In recent years, several blue ribbon commissions and national task forces have presented ambitious prescriptions for reforming and restructuring the nation's education, health, and human service systems in order to improve outcomes for children. While some have argued that public financing and related structural and administrative issues are critical to efforts to foster children's healthy development and school success, none has been framed for the specific purpose of inventively reconceptualizing public financing. Indeed, many of the most thorough and thoughtful reports have called for an overlay of new funds, but have neglected to provide cogent analyses of effective financing strategies, the costs of converting to these approaches, and the potential beneficial outcomes that might accrue from addressing financing reform as an integral aspect of program reform.

In addition, the past several years have witnessed a burgeoning of experimental efforts by mayors and city managers, governors and state agency directors, legislators and council members, program managers and school officials to make government work better and more efficiently. They have been enhanced by the work of people outside of government, including foundation executives, business and labor leaders, community organizers, and academic scholars. Some are creating new ways to raise revenues, manage schools, deliver human services, and spur community economic development. Others are designing new public governance and budgeting systems. Still others are developing and testing new approaches to more directly involve citizens in setting public priorities and maintaining

accountability for public expenditures. Taken together, these efforts suggest the nascent strands of new and improved public financing strategies.

Against this backdrop, a consortium of national foundations established The Finance Project to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public financing for education and an array of other community supports and services for children and their families. Over a three-year period that began in January 1994, The Finance Project is conducting an ambitious agenda of policy research and development activities, as well as policymaker forums and public education. The aim is to increase knowledge and strengthen the capability of governments at all levels to implement strategies for generating and investing public resources that more closely match public priorities and more effectively support improved education and community systems.

As a part of its work, The Finance Project produces a series of working papers on salient issues related to financing for education and other children's services. Some are developed by project staff; others are the products of efforts by outside researchers and analysts. Many are works in progress that will be revised and updated as new information becomes available. They reflect the views and interpretations of the authors. By making them available to a wider audience our intent is to stimulate new thinking and induce a variety of public jurisdictions, private organizations, and individuals to examine the ideas and findings they present and use them to advance their own efforts to improve public financing strategies.

This paper, *Beyond Decategorization: Defining Barriers and Potential Solutions to Creating Effective Comprehensive, Community-based Support Systems for Children and Families*, was written by Martin E. Orland and Ellen Foley. It examines the conditions that are likely to inhibit the development of effective comprehensive community-based service initiatives for children and families, even in a more deregulated policy environment. It also identifies policy directions, particularly at the state level, that appear to hold promise for overcoming these constraints. Through practitioners' views of operational barriers and potential solutions, the paper provides a greater understanding of both the promise and limitations of strategies for building more comprehensive and community-based support systems for children and their families.

Cheryl D. Hayes
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

Social service professionals, politicians, and other decision-makers are increasingly recognizing the disjuncture between the workings of the prevailing service delivery system, and well-established insights into the needs of children and families.[1] The problem is straightforward: Individual and social problems are complex and interconnected, while the delivery of children's and family services is all too often rigid, narrow, and uncoordinated. However, efforts are being made to align practice with theory. There has been increasing advocacy in recent years for comprehensive community-based support systems, which incorporate prevention-oriented, family-centered, locally controlled services. Numerous commissions, government agencies, and academics have produced reports that endorse the development of integrated service delivery systems.[2] Congress has passed at least 12 laws since 1991 that encourage the development of more comprehensive services for children,[3] including many Clinton Administration initiatives, such as Goals 2000 and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act which contain incentives for cross-agency collaboration.

Despite this extensive rhetorical and legislative support for comprehensive initiatives, relatively little is known about the specific obstacles that such efforts can be expected to face in attempting to "do business" differently. Most existing commentaries on the subject focus primarily on the current legal and structural barriers in categorically based financing and service systems. These are cited as a primary roadblock to developing successful comprehensive, community-based support systems for children and families.[4] For example, Dryfoos notes that, while it is technically possible to piece together categorical funds in order to finance comprehensive initiatives, this requires enormous managerial savvy, which many program administrators lack.[5] Others observe how current categorical laws and structures

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[1] Farrow & Bruner, 1993.

[2] See, for example, the National Commission on Children, 1991; Wynn et al., 1994; Kagan et al., 1995; and National Consensus Building Conference on School-linked, Integrated Service Systems, 1994.

[3] See, for example, PL 103-252, Human Services Amendments of 1994 (Sec. 201); PL 103-322, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Sec. 40272); PL 103-382, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Sec. 1115); PL 103-66, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (Sec. 2007); PL 103-160, the National Defense Reauthorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994 (Sec. 1339); PL 102-367, the Job Training Reform Amendments of 1992 (Sec. 492); PL 102-375, the Older Americans Act Amendments of 1992 (Sec. 703); PL 102-484, the National Defense Reauthorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993 (Sec. 195E); PL 102-569, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (Sec. 302); PL 102-586, the amendments to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act of 1974 (Sec. 361); PL 102-590, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Services Program Act of 1992; and PL 102-236, the Abandoned Infants Assistance Act Amendments of 1991 (Sec. 3).

[4] See, for example, Feister, 1994; Gardner, 1994; U.S. Department of Education & American Educational Research Association, 1995; and Sipe et al., 1994.

[5] Dryfoos, 1994.

limit accountability,[6] inhibit cross-sector collaboration, and retard flexible and innovative local practices.[7]

To be sure, while there are some inherent advantages to categorical laws and structures in targeting aid to those in need and developing technical expertise in complicated policy domains,[8] such systems also make more seamless and comprehensive service delivery arrangements much more difficult to orchestrate. However, focusing solely on legal and structural impediments to reform provides only limited guidance in determining other types of barriers to reform and how they might be overcome.

An examination of these other barriers is particularly critical at this time. A changing federal role strongly suggests a new era of more flexible financing mechanisms. This should make it considerably easier for state and local policymakers and program officials to lift laws, regulations, and mandated eligibility and service requirements that have inhibited more comprehensive approaches. But will the elimination or easing of such legal and structural obstacles be enough to usher in a new era of widespread and effective comprehensive community-based service offerings for children and families? If not, what other barriers to success must be addressed? And what role, beyond decategorizing fragmented funding streams, can policy play in overcoming any of these obstacles?

The goal of this paper is to get "beyond decategorization," in order to understand more fully the conditions that are likely, even in a more deregulated environment, to inhibit the development of effective comprehensive community-based service initiatives for children and families. We will also identify policy directions, particularly at the state level, that appear to hold promise for overcoming these constraints. In conducting this analysis, we rely greatly on the voices and insights of current comprehensive program administrators. Through talent and perseverance, these individuals and their organizations have been able to overcome many hurdles to reform. But, as we will show, they are also well aware of the considerable obstacles that must still be overcome. By offering practitioners' views of operational barriers and potential solutions, this paper will provide a greater understanding of both the promise and limitations of legal and structural reforms in building more comprehensive and community-based support systems for children and their families.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Comprehensive, community-based support systems for children and families represent a fundamentally different approach to public service delivery. They differ from traditional servicing arrangements in four significant ways:

- *They incorporate more integrated and flexible service designs aimed at supporting the needs of children within the context of their families and communities.*

  Most current children's service programs are administered by a single agency, which targets the use of funds for narrow, clearly delineated purposes (e.g., hiring substance

[6] Gardner, 1994.
[7] USDE and AERA, 1995.
[8] Gardner, 1994.

abuse professionals) and places detailed restrictions on how resources may and may not be used. By contrast, comprehensive approaches blend resources and coordinate services and supports across professional domains (such as health, social welfare, education, and neighborhood development agencies) as well as public, private, and non-profit institutions. Further, the programs themselves frequently do not focus solely on the child, but also include supports to his or her family and community.

- *They place a greater emphasis on prevention-oriented services and supports.*
  In traditional children's service programs, most resources are made available for treating a problem after it occurs (such as teenage pregnancy). A major objective of comprehensive designs is to prevent problematic outcomes in the first place.
- *They assign a greater role to local communities in program design, implementation, and governance.*
  Most policy decisions in traditional children's and family programs are made by public agencies. In comprehensive initiatives, however, community members exercise substantial decision-making authority in defining high-priority needs and marshaling the resources and program strategies for meeting them.
- *The focus of their accountability systems is on achieving important outcomes for children and families.*
  Instead of the traditional accountability system focus on measuring resource inputs (e.g., how many teacher workshops did the school system offer on classroom disruption), comprehensive initiatives attempt to measure and monitor performance in relation to achieving broad children's, family, and community goals (e.g., lowering the rate of violent incidents in and around neighborhood schools).[9]

Recently, The Finance Project conducted a thorough review of 50 comprehensive, community-based service initiatives currently operating in the United States.[10] Twenty of these, representing a range of characteristics (e.g., location of the initiative, population served, types of services provided), were selected for additional study. The objective was to learn more about the perceived barriers in successfully implementing comprehensive children's and family services, as well as strategies for overcoming them. Administrators for 18 of the 20 initiatives were interviewed for approximately one hour each.[11]

The next section of the paper attempts to document and further illuminate the nature of the barriers identified in the 18 interviews. This is followed by discussions on implications of these findings for policy reform.

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[9] Orland, Danegger & Foley, 1995.
[10] Hayes, Lipoff & Danegger, 1995.
[11] One administrator was unable to find time for an interview, and another was unreachable.

BARRIERS TO CREATING COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Not surprisingly, comprehensive initiative administrators were able to identify several barriers to stable and effective programming.[12] Some of these were strongly associated with the laws, regulations, and requirements of current children's and family service delivery systems. Many others, however, went well beyond these structural impediments to reform.

Structural/Legal Barriers

Since each of the projects selected for study was currently providing services to children and families, it is not surprising that few interviewees claimed that their efforts were inhibited by the multiple rules and regulations of the current categorical system. Many did acknowledge however, that they needed to educate themselves regarding the nature of these rules and requirements in order to "navigate the system" successfully. As one administrator noted:

> *Once we knew what needed to be done and how to do it, we had to learn how to play the game, and had to learn how to be responsible for compliance, but that was just applying [what we learned].*

Confidentiality requirements represent a potential barrier that, at least for this group, turned out to be less formidable than is often supposed. Access to needed data across agencies was negotiated fairly easily by most of the initiatives. In many cases, it was just a matter of finding out what the laws governing confidentiality actually said, educating the partner agencies, and developing data-sharing agreements that did not jeopardize client privacy. Confidentiality requirements did, however, sometimes provide a convenient rationale for the behavior of agency officials not wishing to share data with others, as is illustrated in this interviewee comment:

> *If you don't trust what they're [partner agencies] going to do with the data, you're not going to give it to them. We cut through all that nonsense by having accurate information about the laws that govern confidentiality. This was not readily available, though. We had to search for it. When we started hitting that wall, we researched. Was this practice or was this law? And often it was just practice. Then the legal barrier couldn't be used anymore.*

Somewhat more difficult to overcome were categorical program requirements that made it difficult to draw down funds for planning, administration, and prevention activities:

> *We tried to find a way to decategorize a small amount [from federal program sources] for evaluation and program planning. We wanted to pool federal funds with a matching amount of state funds and effectively decategorize the administrative costs. We have not been wholly successful. It turns out that it's*

[12] It should be noted that many of the barriers reported in this study have also been identified in investigations of service collaboration within a single service delivery domain. See, for example, Newachek et al., (1995) for an examination of barriers to collaboration and service integration in the health care field.

illegal to use federal money for prevention or cross-agency planning! As it exists today, the federal programs are designed in a way where the dollars meet the eligibility requirements for a particular population. This makes it very difficult to support cross-program planning.

Several administrators also frequently alluded to the structural difficulty in transferring funds for supplies and other necessities to their program sites:

There was no central pot of money that could be sent [to the site]. Although there were administrative and overhead dollars attached to each staff member we sent there, there was no way we could break it out of the overall budgets of the agencies . . . [The site] did not have control over its budget. When the director needed to get an approval for something, he had to go through a bunch of different processes, and several different contact people. He had to know which agency was responsible for everything from the copy machine to the toilet paper!

Even in the face of these legal/structural difficulties, resourceful administrators were often able to craft creative solutions to enhance service flexibility. One popular technique was for the initiative to enter into a partnership with a non-governmental agency. Funds from these sources could frequently be used more flexibly, for example, for prevention or professional development or to supply services to participants who were not eligible to receive assistance through other categorical funding streams. One school-based initiative found that the contrast between spending public versus private dollars was clearly visible to their service providers:

I have been surprised at how complicated it is to spend government education dollars. There is very little flexibility: procedures are complex and very slow. In a way, though, this was a plus, because when we were spending private dollars, our process was so fast that teachers were just thrilled. The contrast was a plus.

In summary, while interviewees did cite several legal/structural barriers to operating their comprehensive initiatives, they frequently also reported being able to overcome these obstacles by learning the legal and procedural requirements thoroughly, and working creatively with multiple funding sources. This allowed them to pursue strategies that were both legally compliant and consistent with their comprehensive program objectives.

Of course, our interview sample consists of those in programs whose very successes in launching and sustaining comprehensive service strategies reflect an ability to overcome many legal and procedural obstacles in their path. That our interviewees did not acknowledge these as significant barriers is, therefore, not surprising. What is more interesting is their sense of the obstacles remaining even after legal and structural impediments to reform are addressed.

Other Barriers

Interviewees consistently reported three types of non-legal/structural barriers that they considered critical obstacles to sustaining effective comprehensive service systems for children and families in their communities:

- inadequate knowledge and commitment to collaboration among administrators and staff,
- the lack of a sustainable base of political support, and
- the absence of quality management and evaluation data systems.

These three barriers are all interrelated. Together, they paint a vivid picture of the challenges that will remain for comprehensive service delivery, even under a more deregulated service delivery system.

Inadequate Knowledge and Commitment to Collaboration

Nearly all of the interviewees stressed the difficulty in developing and maintaining relationships with other collaborating agencies. In some cases, lead agency officials had trouble just getting their counterparts in other agencies to consider joint activities. As one administrator noted,

> *It seems natural...to want to make sure we're not overlapping [services], to form partnerships...and find much more efficient ways to do things. [However], it was difficult to get people thinking this way. You always have people concerned with turf. [They are] reluctant to do certain cooperative things. You have to work to prove that you are not trying to take over.*

Even when agencies agreed to work together, administrators reported that developing and maintaining working relationships required nearly constant effort, in part because there was neither a clear model of collaborative service provision, nor prior experiences or useful documentary resources from which they could draw. One interviewee characterized the difficulty this way:

> *There was no relationship with trust, or a common vision, so that had to be built. It really was just understanding what collaboration was. We were on the first movement of collaborative services, [so] there was no culture of collaboration, nothing that is true to the working definition of collaboration.*

As a result, many initiatives have continuously struggled to define what collaboration means operationally. What does it mean, for example, that the social worker and probation officer now share an office in a local school? How do agency roles, responsibilities, and interactions change? Crafting a vision for collaboration and understanding how that vision is put into operation on a day-to-day level is a significant and continuous challenge to comprehensive initiative administrators.

Not only did administrators find it difficult to understand what collaborative efforts meant in terms of their agencies' operations, they also struggled to make it happen. Implementation was a challenge because, even if agency *leaders* understood and shared the

same goals, the vision was not always conveyed thoroughly within and across participating organizations. Many interviewees expressed frustration about the difficulty in translating their vision of collaborative services to the "rank and file," even in their home agencies. They spoke as if they were struggling constantly against their staffs' and other agencies' predilections toward the status quo. An administrator of a multi-site, school-based initiative suggested that there were some trial sites which simply did not understand that the goal of the program was not to co-locate separate services doing business as usual, but to transform the way that services were d .vered. In those sites, the comprehensive initiative is treated like an add-on program and, the administrator disappointedly noted, "after the grant money is up, the social worker will leave the school and go back to the county office." Another interviewee said:

> *[Getting] staff to think broadly with their whole community, even the whole state, in mind is hard...because they are used to working for their "cause," [the issue] they think is most important.*

This propensity to continue to offer (or revert to providing) fragmented, categorical services stems, at least in part, from a lack of training on how to interact constructively with other agencies and disciplines. As Farrow and Joe note, even when structural/legal barriers have been reduced or removed, both pre-service training and agency organization reinforce separate and narrow, rather than comprehensive, solutions to social problems. Several administrators echoed the words of one interviewee, who commented, [13]

> *Categorical programs...get people entrenched in their own space. They "always did it this way," so it's hard to think about things in a new way.*

Another remarked that the staff was so used to traditional ways of doing things that they usually didn't see any need for new training or skill acquisition.[14]

Some interviewees did point to strategies designed to foster more collaboration and cooperation. One interviewee reported giving small discretionary grants ($5,000 or less) to participating organizations in order to ease some of the turf issues and lessen the perceived burden of additional work associated with being a part of the initiative. Another administrator of a school-based program actively recruited program detractors to get involved in the initiative in order to give them a stake in its success:

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[13] Farrow and Joe, 1992.

[14] Many of the initiatives in our sample were sharing staff and, in some cases, space and other overhead, but almost none of our interviewees were involved in efforts that redirected *monetary* resources from one agency to another. While obstacles to collaboration occurred whether or not non-monetary resources were being redistributed across "collaborating" agencies, it is logical to expect that even greater resistance to collaboration will develop if initiatives begin to redirect *monetary* resources.

The music teacher might not like [the idea of] having lots of people in his room after hours, messing up the place. So you make him the leader of the after-school music program, or you have him be on the committee that selects the after-school music teacher. In that way you create a team, and three times as many people can use those [musical] instruments every day.

The apparent positive impacts of efforts like these suggest that, although they are certainly significant, the barriers to fostering constructive inter-agency partnerships for delivering comprehensive services to children and families are not intractable.

The Lack of Sustained External Political Support

In addition to the challenges inherent in developing both intra- and inter-agency support for their initiatives, interviewees also frequently reported difficulties in maintaining external political support for their comprehensive efforts. Such backing was viewed as an important element in securing continued cooperation from agency administrators and front-line service providers, as well as ensuring a stable and reliable flow of funds.

Political impediments to implementing comprehensive service reform were rarely mentioned by interviewees as being a concern during the early stages of an initiative. Indeed, interviewees often remarked that sponsorship by a politically influential "champion" or a cadre of key political supporters was a key factor in enabling them to launch their efforts. These individuals came from both government (e.g., an important state legislator) and the private/non-profit sector (e.g., a major corporate leader or foundation executive). However, many interviewees complained that their most powerful original political supporters were no longer in positions to assist them. As one administrator noted, "Before, the Chairman of the [state's] House Ways and Means Committee was the biggest advocate of our program, but then he lost his office."

When a comprehensive initiative's political sponsors lose power, the initiative becomes increasingly vulnerable to budget cuts or outright elimination. Recognizing this, a number of interviewees cited strategies designed to minimize the impacts of an unstable political environment. One administrator tackled the vicissitudes of an annual funding cycle by obtaining legislation recognizing his collaborative as a public authority, rather than a traditional non-profit organization. The authority, unlike a non-profit, was able to have more stable, multi-year funding. Another made a conscious decision to have the chair of the collaborative be from the private sector and to have CEOs (as opposed to lower-echelon staff) provide active project leadership. A third devoted considerable ongoing energy to ensuring support among senior executive officials involved in the collaboration.

Political strategies such as these may be quite sufficient as long as the comprehensive initiative operates at the margins of service delivery systems. This is because marginal programs do not seriously challenge the status quo. Their small scale generally protects them from "high stakes" political turf battles over resource control, as illustrated in the following anecdote from one interviewee:

We wanted to use our money differently [for prevention-oriented services], but the state and federal money would not fund prevention and early intervention work...We had to find out, if you redeploy staff and have them do different things, does the money stop coming down? And the answer quite often was yes. But then, the project was small enough, these large agencies could just eat it [the loss in revenue].

Most interviewees recognized that this context changes drastically as comprehensive initiatives attempt to grow from demonstration projects to standard modes of local service delivery. To expand and institutionalize these efforts requires the restructuring of power relationships and reallocation of resource authority among major actors in the service delivery system. This is why interviewees cited project expansion and institutionalization as constituting their biggest challenge.

The Absence of Quality Management and Evaluation Data Systems

Many of the interviewees recognized that the development of quality data and evaluation systems for comprehensive initiatives was critical both to build administrative and staff support for collaboration and to generate the needed political backing for program continuation, expansion, and institutionalization. Interviewees believed that achieving the goals of interagency collaboration and cooperation was strongly inhibited by the fact that planning, budgeting, management, and accountability systems were almost always agency-specific. One administrator wondered,

How do you deal with audit trails when you blend money? If you still have separate systems following them, then that is not blended funding. [The categorical requirements] require a whole new subsystem to track those dollars. With two systems running at the same time, how do you get flexibility? And if you do get flexibility to use existing resources differently, is that such a benefit to them that the upfront costs [for data management] don't matter over time?

It is difficult to imagine administrators and frontline employees making major and sustained investments in collaboration when their basic data and reporting structures are incompatible with such behaviors.

Nearly all program administrators also expressed a compelling need to document positive outcomes from their initiatives. They believed that the political climate was becoming increasingly hostile to public spending, especially in the social services arena, and that the only way to compete effectively for scarce resources in this environment was to show that the benefits of these investments outweighed their costs:

The bottom line is that if we do not produce, we will not maintain support....Our strategy is to develop a system of outcome indicators and benchmarks, so we can show that we have achieved [our] goals.

Many were politically attuned to the importance of conducting assessments that demonstrate cost-effectiveness. As one noted:

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If we can show that more kids are graduating from high schools and going on to college, that is pretty positive. If they can see that, they can see where the program pays for itself.

This near-universal perception of the need for improved information and outcome evaluation systems was often combined with frustration over the inability to meet current and anticipated future demands. One interviewee was particularly eloquent on the topic:

The main problem is that as the program has increased its funding, there have been more requests for documentation of results. We have had to put a lot of time into proving there are positive results connected with what we do....We have tried to develop a client tracking data system, but for evaluation, we have no comparison group. So we have no immediate data to present to the legislature.

The lack of capacity to acquire useful data and conduct sound outcome evaluations of comprehensive initiatives has been well documented by several authors[15] and is reinforced by the findings in this study. While most program administrators felt strongly that showing positive outcomes is essential to the long-term survival of their efforts, they also reported lacking the resources and technical expertise to conduct rigorous evaluations and create new management information systems. At best, they were at the earliest stages of system design and, despite frequently ambitious objectives (one site, for example, was planning to build a community-wide database across agencies), acutely aware of the monumental challenges lying ahead of them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

In sum, our study identified four major types of barriers:

- *Structural/legal barriers* are those endemic to the formal service delivery system, as reflected in legal constraints, regulations, procedural requirements, etc.
- *Staff knowledge and commitment to collaboration barriers* refer to a lack of technical expertise and/or the rigidity of attitudes among administrators and service providers that limit the ability of initiatives to work collaboratively.
- *Political support barriers* relate to the challenge of establishing and maintaining external support for an initiative among political and policy officials, key constituency groups, and the broader general public.
- *Management information and evaluation data system barriers* concern the difficulties involved in constructing new cross-agency data networks and outcomes-based assessment systems necessary for effective planning, budgeting, management, and evaluation of comprehensive servicing arrangements.[16]

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[15] See Hayes, Lipoff, & Danegger, 1995; Connell et al., 1995; Young, Gardner, & Coley, 1994; Hollister & Hill, 1995; and Levin, 1994.

[16] Of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive, because the barriers often overlap or relate to one another in a significant way. Placing the identified barriers into this framework should therefore be thought of as a useful heuristic for better understanding the different types of impediments administrators perceive as important to address in order to deliver quality comprehensive services.

Table 1 lists the barriers by type. At least from the perspective of the administrators of these 18 initiatives, challenges to creating successful comprehensive children's and family support systems go well beyond overcoming unsupportive laws and regulations. In fact, as reported earlier, these sites frequently devised successful strategies to surmount legal and structural hurdles, such as agency-specific confidentiality requirements, and restrictions on using funds for planning and prevention. But these sites would often find themselves facing other obstacles that were at least equally telling: the dispositions, knowledge, and skills of administrators and staff; an unstable external political environment; and the lack of an adequate information base.

What, then, do these findings suggest regarding a constructive direction for public policy in stimulating more comprehensive, community-based service and support strategies? It is impossible to address this question without first understanding the evolving public policy landscape and what it is likely to mean for the comprehensive services movement. The 104th Congress has made an unprecedented attempt to devolve federal governance and financial responsibilities for children's and family services to the states. At this writing, a number of legislative proposals are pending to replace much of the current system of federally defined categorical grants and individual entitlements with a series of state-administered block grants in areas such as welfare, child welfare, child care, food and nutrition, and education and job training. There is also an emerging bipartisan consensus to reduce the size of the federal government's commitment to finance services and supports for low-income children and families, as a component of an overall strategy for achieving a balanced budget.

While the exact legislative outcomes from each of these trends are still being determined, two results are reasonably certain: 1) states will inherit greater responsibility for designing, administering, and funding services and supports for children and families, and 2) states will be given fewer federal resources to pay for them. From the perspective of implementing successful comprehensive service and support systems for children and families, these trends work in opposite directions, creating both unique opportunities and challenges in the months and years ahead.

Earlier in this paper, we observed that many administrators reported being able to overcome what at first glance appeared to be significant legal and structural obstacles to effective comprehensive service provision. However, it was also apparent from the interviews how much effort was involved in this process, and how these officials' own high levels of commitment and capacity were critical to their achievements. It is clear that in order for comprehensive service initiatives to expand beyond the purview of managerially gifted and talented administrators (and thus become a more prevalent mode of operation), more streamlined and flexible rules and regulatory frameworks will be required.

States will undoubtedly have greater opportunities to design these types of systems in the emerging era of reduced federal authority. But it cannot be assumed that the states will necessarily do so. Kansas state budget director Gloria Timmer, points out that many *current* legal and structural requirements for service delivery come from the state, not the federal

Table 1. Major Barriers Identified in Administrator Interviews

Structural/Legal Barriers
• Learning the nature of categorical rules and requirements • Learning the rules governing confidentiality • Using federal funds for planning, administration, and prevention
Other Barriers
Staff Knowledge and Commitment to Collaboration • Developing and maintaining interagency relationships (turf, trust issues) • Understanding what collaboration means in practice • Conveying the collaborative vision throughout and across organizations • Staff thinking narrowly and traditionally, not seeing the need for new skills
Political Support • Losing political "champions" • Resource instability/annual funding cycles • Limited backing for project expansion and institutionalization
Management Information and Evaluation Data Systems • Inadequate and uncoordinated data collection/data organizing mechanisms • Inability to document positive outcomes

government.[17] Functionally fragmented categorical state infrastructures will continue to exist (at least for a time), irrespective of new federal policies. States can be expected to resist major restructuring of existing service delivery mechanisms. An equally significant barrier is that many, if not most, state policymaking officials are no more inclined than their federal counterparts to give up significant political and policy authority to local governments and communities.

In the event that states *do* design more streamlined and flexible regulatory frameworks that make it easier for localities to create and implement comprehensive approaches for serving children and families, upcoming fiscal constraints can be expected to inhibit the large-scale implementation of such designs. A transition to comprehensive service delivery systems will, in all likelihood, require *increased*, not decreased, spending levels, at least at the outset.[18] But reductions in future federal funding, especially when combined with demographic and economic trends,[19] are likely to strain state and local capacity to support existing spending levels, let alone funding increases.

Fiscal constraints can be expected to hamper efforts to move from fragmented to comprehensive service arrangements in at least two ways. First, they will make it more difficult for states and localities to move from crisis intervention to prevention-oriented activities. In an era of scarcer resources to address social service needs, there will be increased pressure to support urgent, frontline services (such as child protective services and emergency health care), crowding out monies for more long-term investments in prevention and healthy child development. Second, it will be harder to obtain the funds for badly needed investments in building administrative capacity (at all levels) to support some of the critical infrastructure development needs identified in the site interviews—such as the training and orientation of administrators and staff, and the development of quality management information and evaluation systems.

CONCLUSIONS: AN AGENDA FOR STATE REFORM

The foregoing discussions should make it abundantly clear that, at most, federal decategorization efforts constitute a necessary but far from a sufficient condition to usher in a new era of more comprehensive children's and family service and support systems. It also suggests that such restructurings are, and will continue to be in the foreseeable future, extremely difficult to implement in practice. But states are not impotent in this process. Feasible and appropriate policy actions can reasonably be expected to sustain the current momentum for comprehensive service systems in the short run and to facilitate their expansion in the longer term. Based mainly on the analysis of information provided in our 18 sites, we offer six specific suggestions on directions for state policy reform:

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[17] Public statement at media briefing sponsored by The Finance Project, September 29, 1995.
[18] See the Conservation Company & the Juvenile Law Center, 1994; and Bruner, 1994.
[19] See Orland & Cohen, 1995; and Wallace, 1995.

1. *Work to coordinate state agency program strategies and resource allocation policies.*
   Developing a more collaborative organizational approach at the state level is an essential first step in supporting comprehensive, community-based services. With a few noteworthy exceptions, there currently exists little state-level coordination in service delivery strategies or resource allocation policies among children's and family service agencies (e.g., education, health, child protection, mental health, juvenile justice). This makes it exceedingly difficult to orchestrate such initiatives locally. An increase in state flexibility and policy authority brings with it an unprecedented opportunity to restructure state operations as well, because states will have less need to mirror federal categorical structures with their own fragmented "stovepipes." This opportunity should be seized.
2. *Move toward an accountability system based more heavily on achieving desired results for children and families through reducing procedural regulation of service delivery*
   For comprehensive service designs to be considered seriously as service delivery options, local accountability mechanisms must be realigned accordingly. This means eventually replacing many input-based categorical and procedural regulations with accountability systems that focus on achieving broad outcomes or results. Holding service providers more accountable for performance outcomes that transcend traditional agency boundaries will give providers the organizational incentives necessary to collaborate in designing and implementing comprehensive service approaches. But overcoming the political, technical, and organizational difficulties inherent in developing and employing appropriate outcome accountability indicators will require significant sustained investments. Therefore, the transition from process- to outcome-based accountability systems should be carefully planned and gradually sequenced over a number of years, in order to ensure that vulnerable populations are protected, that the needed data and evaluation systems are in place, and that the staff working under the new system receive the necessary training.
3. *Invest in a cross-agency information infrastructure.*
   Our informants consistently pointed out that effective and sustainable comprehensive service designs require responsive management information systems. Yet most current systems, with their agency-specific orientations, are ill equipped to serve comprehensive service information needs. States could address this problem by setting aside resources for the express purpose of coordinating data collection and management systems across agencies. While both technical and funding constraints will make full-fledged information system redesign a challenging multi-year endeavor, less ambitious reforms (such as streamlining processes for cross-agency data sharing) are feasible in the short run, and can be expected to both encourage additional collaborations and improve the effectiveness and long-term survival prospects of existing comprehensive efforts.
4. *Encourage more integrated pre-service training experiences for children's and family service administrators and front-line providers.*
   The administrator interviews make clear that successful comprehensive initiatives need staff who are skilled in collaboration and have a broad knowledge of the social service

system and the multiple needs of children. Current pre-service professional development programs, largely based in higher-education institutions, fail to equip workers with such knowledge and skills. States can play a lead role in encouraging the professions to redefine what staff need to know as a prerequisite for employment. And states can use the policy levers available to them—such as their role in helping to set employee licensing and accreditation standards—to ensure that pre-service programs provide orientation and training that is consistent with the role of this new type of social service professional.

5. *Provide monetary incentives for collaboration.*
   With their increased resource flexibility, states could provide some tangible financial incentives for increased local collaboration. For example, they could give funding priority to groups that represent a coalition of service providers, or award special planning grants earmarked for local collaboratives. By providing even relatively modest rewards for collaboration, states can help local policymakers and administrators to address some of the political, social, and psychological barriers to reform that were described in our administrator interviews.
6. *Help to ensure multi-year funding for comprehensive initiatives.*
   There is no doubt that resource instability, driven by an annual funding cycle, makes developing collaborative relationships among public agencies and other service providers difficult. State policies that help secure stable multi-year funding for comprehensive children's and family initiatives would not only help to stabilize inter-agency relationships, but also permit the initiatives to develop longer-term plans, which is an appropriate activity for an intervention designed to make a lasting community impact.

Together, these six reform directions point toward a new role for the states in their relationships with local governments and communities. Interestingly, it is one that is consistent with much of the current rhetoric of state officials on a redefined state/federal relationship—one in which the federal government establishes broad policy direction and systems of outcome accountability, ensures standards of service equity, and provides supportive training and technical assistance, but does not micro-manage state service offerings or monitor isolated resource inputs. Ultimately, overcoming the barriers to creating, sustaining, and expanding comprehensive, community-based services and supports for children and families will require that states *do unto local governments as they would have the federal government do unto them.*

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THE FINANCE PROJECT

The Finance Project is a national initiative to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public financing for education and other children's services. With leadership and support from a consortium of private foundations, The Finance Project was established as an independent nonprofit organization, located in Washington, DC. Over a three-year period that began in January 1994, the project is undertaking an ambitious array of policy research and development activities, as well as policymaker forums and public education activities.

Specific activities are aimed at increasing knowledge and strengthening the nation's capability to implement promising strategies for generating public resources and improving public investments in children and their families, including:

- examining the ways in which governments at all levels finance public education and other supports and services for children (age 0-18) and their families;
- identifying and highlighting structural and regulatory barriers that impede the effectiveness of programs, institutions, and services, as well as other public investments, aimed at creating and sustaining the conditions and opportunities for children's successful growth and development;
- outlining the nature and characteristics of financing strategies and related structural and administrative arrangements that are important to support improvements in education and other children's services;
- identifying promising approaches for implementing these financing strategies at the federal, state and local levels and assessing their costs, benefits, and feasibility;
- highlighting the necessary steps and cost requirements of converting to new financing strategies; and
- strengthening intellectual, technical, and political capability to initiate major long-term reform and restructuring of public financing systems, as well as interim steps to overcome inefficiencies and inequities within current systems.

The Finance Project is expected to extend the work of many other organizations and blue-ribbon groups that have presented bold agendas for improving supports and services for children and families. It is creating the vision for a more rational approach to generating and investing public resources in education and other children's services. It is also developing policy options and tools to actively foster positive change through broad-based systemic reform, as well as more incremental steps to improve current financing systems.

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